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ABSTRACT

This issue of a quarterly newsletter on lifelong learning focuses on the theme of the arts and humanities in adult literacy education. The following articles are included: (1) "In Defense of a Practical Education" (Earl Shorris); (2) "From the Program Director" (Elizabeth Bryant McCrary); (3) "Vermont Council on the Humanities: Book Discussion Groups for Adult Basic Education Students" (Nedene Martin); (4) "Organizing Book Discussion Groups" (Nedene Martin); (5) "A Sound Idea: Music in Charis Dike's ESL (English as a Second Language) Classroom" (Barbara Christopher); (6) "Learning through the Arts" (Sheilia Wright); (7) "Hooked on Learning: The Internet Poetry Project" (Linda W. Parrish); (8) "Courtroom Drama and the Literacy Classroom" (Joanne Dowdy); and (9) "Wildflower" (Earl Shorris). A poem, information on the Lifelong Learning Network, and news about upcoming conferences are included. (KC)

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WORD'S WORTH

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

A Quarterly Newsletter of the Lifelong Learning Network — Summer 1998

In Defense of a Practical Education

by Earl Shorris

(Earl Shorris is the author of Under the Fifth Sun: A Novel of Pancho Villa and Latinos: A Biography of the People. He has also edited and contributed to a previous book on poverty in America entitled While Someone Else Is Eating and is a contributing editor at Harper's magazine)

Three years ago, on the Lower East Side of New York City, with the help of my wife and a few friends, I began an experiment in education. In a borrowed classroom, relying on the advice of a woman in a maximum security prison, with a little help from Petrarch and Robert Maynard Hutchins, we taught the humanities to the poor. And we did not do it with childish things; we began with Socrates, set theory, the drawings on the walls of the caves of Lascaux, natural law, and a sheaf of English poetry.

Most people who heard about the experiment thought it was foolish. They considered it impractical. The rule for the poor, as for most of the rest of America, was to be educated in practical things. After all, the greatness of this country grew out of its practicality, from Baxter's belief that "time is money" to Franklin's earthy aphorisms in Poor Richard's Almanac to James's Pragmatism. Furthermore, the humanities, Allan Bloom had told us in "The Closing of the American Mind," were for the enjoyment of the elite, whom he said, "have been raised in comfort and with the expectation of ever increasing comfort." The poor, he said, "have their own needs." They do not belong to what he called, in a strange contradiction in terms, " the democratic version of an aristocracy."

Thus, the idea of teaching the humanities to the poor was condemned not only as impractical, but impossible. What we should have done for the poor, according to the conventional wisdom, was teach them something they could use on the job. Experience is the teacher of first resort in America. We learn by doing, we train for our careers. That is what is known as the practical form of education, and if it is good enough for doctors, engineers, computer programmers, and business people, it is surely appropriate for the poor. But this learning by doing -- remove an appendix, build a bridge, create a piece of software, or make a fortune -- has only one purpose: to teach us to do a job of work, and of a very specific kind. But training, even at its most elegant level, is as impractical as any building without a foundation, a danger to itself and those around it.

(continued on page 8)

Inside this edition:

***Focus:* Arts & Humanities in Adult Education**

In Defense of a Practical Education 1
by Earl Shorris

From the Program Director 2
by Elizabeth Bryant McCrary

Vermont Council on the Humanities Book Discussion Groups for Adult Basic Education Students 3
by Nedene Martin

Organizing Book Discussion Groups 4
by Nedene Martin

A Sound Idea: Music in Charis Dike's ESL classroom 4
by Barbara Christopher

Learning through the Arts 5
by Shelia Wright

Hooked on Learning: The Internet Poetry Project 6
by Linda W. Parrish

Courtroom Drama and the Literacy Classroom 7
by Joanne Dowdy

Wildflower 9
by Earl Shorris

Correspondence and inquiries may be directed to:
Barbara Christopher, Editor
Ron Rucker, Assistant Editor
Georgia Tech - CRT
Atlanta, GA 30332-0156
(404) 894-0561
email: barbara.christopher@arch.gatech.edu

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From the Program Director

by Elizabeth Bryant McCrary

(Elizabeth "Beth" Bryant McCrary is Program Director for the Lifelong Learning Network and the Information Technology Training Program at Georgia Tech.)

This issue of Word's Worth focuses on the use of the arts and humanities in literacy. Across the country, teachers are using a creative range of music, art, poetry, plays, and other forms of expression to expand students' awareness and improve their reading and writing abilities. Although the Lifelong Learning Network (LLN) is known for the use of technology, we are very interested in creative media for learning. One of our components, the Learning For Life (LFL) video series, is a demonstration of our interests.

Each 30 minute LFL tape will contain a variety of segments to assist adults with reading and writing. The reading/writing connection is considered the core of the initial LFL series. Subjects such as sentence mechanics, paragraph development, sequencing, and editing will be taught through creative video stimuli, analogies and modeling.

The LFL series is designed for group instruction, but may be used by an individual student. Each tape may stand alone or be used in a skills building sequence. Students reading at the lower-level can start with the sentence mechanics, while those reading at higher levels can begin with paragraph development. A teacher may use just one tape or the entire series.

The series will be supported by workbook and CD-ROM exercises. The Learning For Life series is in the early phases of development. Our goal is to complete 8-12 instructional tapes before June 1999. I look forward to sharing more about LLN's progress in the next issue.

Beth Bryant McCrary

LIFELONG LEARNING
N • E • T • W • O • R • K

The Lifelong Learning Network (LLN) is a collaborative effort between the College of Architecture's Center for Rehabilitation Technology at Georgia Institute of Technology, the Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education, and Literacy Action, Inc. LLN's objectives are to:

- Provide staff development training courses that promote greater computer literacy and fuller integration of computer technology in the ABE classroom.
- Develop a series of videotaped supplements for literacy instruction.
- Design and produce CD-ROM tools to supplement the videotaped series.
- Execute research to determine the benefits of video supplements and computer technology in the advancement of literacy instruction.
- Open an avenue for exchanging ideas between ABE practitioners, researchers and policy makers.

Staff:
Beth Bryant McCrary, *Program Director*
Liz Dillon Black, *Program Specialist*
Barbara Christopher, *Admin. Coordinator*
Bill Curtis, *Multimedia Developer*
Mark Johnson, *Research Associate*
Arthur Martin, *Road Scholar Instructor*
Arthur Murphy, *Research Scientist*
Ron Rucker, *Project Coordinator*
Patty Wood, *Writer/Producer*

For more information on the Lifelong Learning Network call (800) 428-7323 or visit our website at:
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Vermont Council on the Humanities - Book Discussion Groups for Adult Basic Education Students

by Nedene Martin

(Nedene Martin is Communications Director for the Vermont Council on the Humanities (VCH). Previously, she worked for fifteen years as a broadcast journalist and independent radio producer. In conjunction with Central Vermont Adult Basic Education, Nedene produced and hosted "Radio Reading," a VCH grant-sponsored half-hour weekly broadcast of readings by professional actors. Adult education students received copies of the books from which the broadcasts were excerpted, and participated in live discussions during the radio programs.)

The Vermont Council on the Humanities (VCH) put together a proposal to bring scholar-led humanities book discussions into the jails. Inmates who volunteered to participate would be given sets of books to read in advance, and would get together to talk about them. Robert "Bob" Lucenti, Superintendent of Schools for the district comprising all the incarcerated people in Vermont's correctional system, admits that he had his doubts originally. Bob was particularly doubtful when he learned that these Connections book discussions centered around such themes as The Odyssey and The Legends of King Arthur. His thought was, "why would they [the inmates] care?"

Today, Mr. Lucenti describes himself as "a new convert." He has become convinced that humanities reading and discussion programs are powerful and essential experiences for incarcerated criminals. The reason? It's the same reason given by longtime adult education teachers and by adult students themselves: humanities programs catalyze change.

Mr. Lucenti points out that the majority of Vermont's prisoners are young, male, and native to the state. Some 80% have not completed secondary school; they are typically unskilled, have "low self-confidence, low self-esteem, and virtually no critical thinking skills." Yet 96% of them will be back on the outside, living in a Vermont community, within five years. It is thus very important to the safety and tranquillity of Vermont's communities, as well as to the lives of the individual inmates, that they emerge from incarceration changed.

Connections programs typically use six to nine thematically-related children's books, some of them picture books, as the focus of scholar-led discussion groups. Says Bob, "we have watched these kids [the inmates] sit absolutely enthralled by these scholars — it is something they have never experienced in their lives before." People's communication with them "has always been on an adversarial model," Lucenti says, involving finger-pointing and accusations. Talking as equals among equals about the decisions and actions of characters in a book is a completely new experience. Often, says Lucenti, "once they can sit and look at a character and discuss it, they can externalize it." After discussing the motivations and situations of characters in books, prisoners find it easier to discuss their own situations and behaviors, to see alternatives, to recognize that different people make different choices. This opens the door to change.

The internal changes produced in non-prisoner participants in VCH programs do not carry such societal urgency. But they are important to the people experiencing the changes, and they ripple out through families and generations. Anna Duprey, an adult basic education student, says it was a VCH program on Franco-American heritage that inspired her "to start looking up about my own family. I wouldn't have done it if not for that." Richard "Rip" Thurston, who entered adult basic education after age 50, has become an enthusiast of VCH's annual statewide humanities conference for adult literacy students. Rip has attended every conference since their inception in 1988, except two — "them two I was in the hospital, so I couldn't get to it." Rip "recycles" his Connections books by giving them to his grandchildren. Having now obtained his high school equivalency diploma, Rip has enrolled in community college courses. He also serves on a panel that plans field trips for adult students, several of which have been museum visits supported by VCH mini-grants. Says Rip, comparing his new self with his old, "I have a lot more self-confidence."

It was Julie Landry, an instructor with Central Vermont Adult Basic Education, who first approached the humanities council with a request for book discussions tailored to the abilities of adult new readers. About a dozen years ago, she wrote to say that she had accompanied one of her students to a Council program at the local public library. The student was very interested in the topic and would have liked to join in its discussion, but the reading level of the books in the series was beyond what she could manage. For the Vermont Council on the Humanities, Julie's letter caused an epiphany. It had simply not occurred to members of the staff or board that there was a significant portion of the Vermont population that was excluded from participation in Council programs for lack of the ability to read the materials.

The Council's mission was to make humanities programs available to all Vermonters, and so, as Executive Director Victor Swenson expresses the revelation, "we couldn't mean it, that humanities programs are for everyone, except not for you, and you, and you." So Connections series were designed, using the best of children's literature as avenues to discussion of all the issues that intrigue adult human minds. After more than a decade of using

(continued on page 10)

Organizing Book Discussion Groups

by Nedene Martin

For those who might wish to implement similar programs, here are some specifics about how VCH Connections programs and humanities conferences for adult new readers are organized and conducted. The success of our programs is dependent upon excellent collaboration with adult education teachers, correctional instructors, and anyone else who is teaching adults better reading skills. Connections programs and student conferences rely on active student recruitment efforts by teachers. It won't work to simply hang up posters and expect that people will come — although VCH does provide posters to be hung at adult learning centers, laundromats, grocery store bulletin boards, and on folks' refrigerators. Expect that it may take several sessions of low attendance before word begins to spread among students that this is a stimulating, fun, and safe experience.

Connections series usually consist of three sessions, scheduled a month apart. At each series, discussion focuses on two picture books and a novel. Students receive the books in advance as gifts and read them with their teachers prior to the discussion. (If a student reads too slowly to finish the books, the teacher helps prepare the student for participation in the discussion by reading the books aloud.) Holding discussions in a setting familiar to the students helps put them at ease. A publicized snack break is both an added attraction to attendance and a chance for social interaction. Each session is geared to last for an hour and a half.

We use "scholars" to lead the discussions. Literacy instructors enjoy having the "scholars" come to their classroom because it exposes students, who often move in limited social and cultural circles, to an outside person, with another viewpoint on life. Bringing in an outside scholar is also important for its leavening effect; it is, as one teacher told us, "democratic." VCH Program Director Suzi Wizowaty explains that "students and teachers are meeting as equal members of the group. This is in sharp contrast to tutoring sessions where, inescapably, the teacher is fluent at what the student is struggling to learn." A key element of VCH's Connections programs and humanities conferences for literacy students and their teachers is that "at the discussion sessions everyone has prepared the same materials," Suzi notes. "Some have done so easily and others painfully, but that distinction becomes unimportant. All participants bring their own experience and insight to bear on the reading. Everybody's thoughts, observations and opinions are equally worthy of being considered, weighed and discussed."

The ability to facilitate a truly democratic discussion is a key qualification for being a VCH scholar. Another is expertise in and love of children's literature. In VCH book discussions for literacy audiences, there is no lecture (at the conferences, keynote lectures take place in plenary sessions, following which participants separate into small groups for discussions). Successful scholars demonstrate a personal comfort and ease with the students, a willingness to work at treating all participants equally and to gently draw out the reticent, a genuine interest in students' opinions and perspectives, and a deeply felt pleasure in the material. Anyone wishing more information about how to start organizing Connections series or hosting a literacy conference may contact the program office of the Vermont Council on the Humanities at (802) 888-3183.

A Sound Idea: Music in Charis Dike's ESL classroom

by Barbara Christopher

Music has more to offer than pure enjoyment. For Charis Dike, music is a teaching tool for ESL students. "There is no denying it provides students with a pleasurable activity, but it also enhances their listening, speaking and reading skills," says Charis, an ESL teacher at Dekalb Technical Institute.

Listening, Reading and Speaking:
Charis maintains that singing engages the imagination and helps her students discriminate the sounds of English words and aids in pronunciation. "Many of my students have strong accents when speaking but their accents tend to disappear when they sing," notes Charis. As a result, her students experience, sometimes for the first time, the proper formation and sounds of words.

Her students also engage in music discussion groups. They listen to a piece of music, read through the verses, discuss the meaning of the song and how it relates to their own experiences and finally as a class, they sing the song. Charis's class has several favorite pieces of music. One is Louis Armstrong's "Wonderful World", which according to Charis, works well with all her students, even students with very little English fluency. Another one of their favorites is "Tears in Heaven" by Eric Clapton.

Challenges:
Finding songs that are universally appropriate has proved to be Charis' biggest challenge. In a classroom that includes people from different countries, finding music which is culturally appropriate for all is difficult. While violence is considered inappropriate by most of her students, for others, music with any type of sexual connotation is offensive.

Tips for using music in the ESL classroom:
The selection of music takes careful planning. Teachers might consider the students cultural interpretation of the music as well as the mood you wish to set when planning. For example, some music can assist with mental and physical relaxation while other music is invigorating. Charis had one student who said that using music in the classroom actually lowered her blood pressure. The student stated that music had a calming influence and helped her relax so she could learn.

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Learning through the Arts

by Shelia Wright

(Shelia Wright recently received her Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction at North Carolina State University. She has worked as an artist, educator, administrator, and consultant for over seventeen years. She has taught at the elementary, community college, and university levels.)

Learning defines our lives as human beings and shapes our place in school and society. It guides our economic livelihood and validates our entry into the workplace. Learning is more than reading and writing, and arithmetic. It is color, sound, and thought forms that often go unnoticed. It defines the boundaries of our perceptions and gives meaning to our experience.

In this article I will explore the arts (i.e., music, theater, literature, dance, the visual arts, etc.) as a vehicle for transformation - as a way of removing the veil of consciousness which defines our knowing. In pursing the conversation, I will discuss three areas: (1) the contributions of the arts to the learning process, (2) the conditions necessary for using the arts in education, and (3) a "real life" example of where the arts have been successful.

Contribution of the Arts

What distinguishes the arts is their compatibility with students' diverse learning styles, interests, backgrounds, etc. Through the arts, we are compelled to investigate our imagination and to make the strange more familiar. The arts therefore provide a universal language for facilitating learning, a way for learners to experience and move beyond anyone's wildest dreams but their own.

In essence, the arts provide a safe zone for learners to grow without the stigma of socially constructed hierarchies. The arts naturally use the learner's prior knowledge which defines their competence and uniqueness. They give the individual a chance to make his or her own choices and provide the affirmation and empowerment necessary for their success.

The arts are forgiving in a way seldom explored using other methods of instruction. There is simply a higher tolerance for "mistakes" and a greater chance for reflection and productivity. The quality of work produced is personal, meaningful, and sustaining. Through the arts, the barrier of "can't" is removed and valuable linkages to the "real world" are made a part of our reality.

Specifically, the arts:

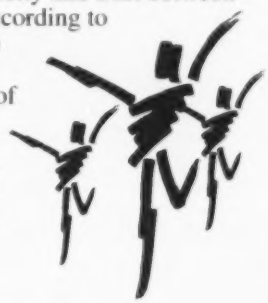
- actively engage students in the learning process;
- contribute to a more creative learning environment;
- provide a more dynamic and interdisciplinary curriculum;
- offer critical connections to the larger community, culture and other institutions;
- connect practical experience with formal education, and
- improve academic performance by encouraging self-directed knowledge and by honoring the way students individually perceive the world.

Conditions for Learning

We know that cognitive development is inclusive of creative, analytical and practical properties (Sternberg, 1994). We also know that interdisciplinary methods are highly effective in working with students' diverse learning preferences (Gardner, 1985). In using the arts, students are able to pursue a variety of ideas that have unique meaning in their daily lives. However, much consideration must be given to their co-participation in the creation of curriculum and the evaluation of its effectiveness.

Removal of unnecessary stress is crucial when encouraging personal growth. From the facilitator's perspective, activities and experiences that stimulate learners' inquiry, promote their "first hand knowledge," and heighten their sense of expression presents a useful strategy in using the arts to facilitate understanding.

There is also the issue of reciprocity and trust between the learner and the teachers. According to Southworth (1987), teachers are primary vessels in transmitting knowledge, and must be aware of the psychodynamics involved influencing the learner's inner mind and the information being examined. Without substance, Southworth adds, the "I" of the individual is forced by circumstance to seek other sources which may or may not sustain their healthy development as a learner.



Lastly, it is important to build upon students' natural desire for learning. Many enjoy learning but dislike the process of school. While they may not express their ability in ways that we validate as socially acceptable, students nevertheless embody a wealth of knowledge which can be utilized more effectively in the classroom. The point is, learning occurs for the individual regardless of the conditions. Understanding where a student enters the conversation is relative to his or her own growth, development, and use of knowledge which is an essential first step in developing a more responsive program. It is also important to align the learner's perceptions of quality with instructional strategies (Wright, 1998). In doing so, students are given an opportunity to excel in a climate of success as opposed to "failure."

Direct experience is also a powerful vehicle for learning. It helps students comprehend the deeper meaning of

(continued on page 10)

Hooked on Learning: *The Internet Poetry Project*

by Linda W. Parrish

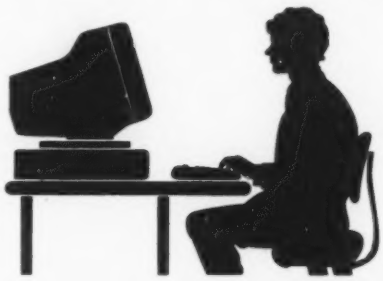
(After rearing two children, Linda Parrish returned to teaching in 1989. She became a Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) reading tutor and trainer and was hired by Swainsboro Technical Institute, Swainsboro, Georgia, as its first Adult Education Instructor. She now teaches reading, English and writing with technology classes and co-directs the skills lab.)

The Adult Education program at Swainsboro Technical Institute, Swainsboro, Georgia, started with one instructor, a trailer for an office, and an old grocery store shopping cart in which to trundle our books from borrowed classroom to classroom. We now have two full-time instructors, an intake specialist, our own classrooms and offices, and a 25-station networked computer lab. Most learners in our adult education program are in their 20's and 30's and have dropped out of school before completing the ninth grade.

The Challenge

My students were often passive learners - usually doing assignments, but exhibiting little excitement about their learning. Faced with the challenge of motivating my students, I began researching ways that I could use technology as a hook to interest the students in writing. Several questions arose in this endeavor. How can I help the students be participatory, cooperative learners instead of passive learners? In what ways will using computer technology prepare them for the GED?

Andrea Herrmann (1989) advised that the dynamics of peer collaboration and feedback in classrooms where computers are used to teach writing differ from that in traditional classrooms. Various classroom studies suggest real benefits from students who can interact effectively with their peers. Computers as writing tools appear to promote a collaborative environment, both in learning to write and in learning to use the technology.



My hunch was that many adults are attracted to computers because they present information in a new, fun way and because the Internet is a status symbol. If I could get students to begin asking questions and finding answers to those questions on the Internet and writing to me via e-mail, would they become eager participants in the learning process? In addition, by having students use the literature module of PLATO software as well as do online research about poetry and classroom writing projects, I expected them to be prepared for the Literature and Arts component of the GED examination.

The Project

I began the writing class by asking students to participate in an experimental class where we would use our own questions and the computers to learn. We started with an introduction to poetry. I gave them a diverse sample, from Alan Seeger's " I Have a Rendezvous with Death" to Shel Silverstein's "Plugged In." I read some poems aloud, and they took the rest home to investigate on their own. The students and I generated several questions about poetry: Why do people write poetry? What kinds of people write poetry? Why doesn't it always rhyme? What's the secret to writing poetry? What's the difference between a poem and a paragraph? Where does poetry come from? I was trying to spark student interest, and I wanted their questions to give direction to class discussions that would come later.

I had previously researched poetry on the Internet and found ten web sites for the students to investigate during their lab hours. The first assignment was to go to those sites and find five poems that spoke to them, print them, and e-mail the list of poems and authors to me. We had poetry anthologies in the classroom they could use, and I suggested they visit the public library if they could not find poetry they liked on the Internet.

After receiving step by step guidance in how to gain access to the Internet, navigate the web sites, and send e-mail correctly, I was pleased to observe the student's enthusiasm. The five poems were to be the start of each student's poetry notebook. I was surprised to find that several students were writing their own poetry; they put original pieces in their notebooks and sometimes shared them with the class. Surprising, too, was their choice of poems. I had expected the love poems or poems with modern colloquialisms, but they also chose classics such as "The Charge of the Light Brigade," "The Raven," and "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud."

Back in the classroom, I divided the class into three groups, each receiving a section of questions to answer and report to the class. They used encyclopedias, the PLATO software, and the Internet poetry sites for their research. Cooperative learning was not new to my students; they always enjoyed working in small groups. However, the focus this time was on their questions, not mine.

Before the final project, I arranged for a local poet to come to class to read his poems and to answer questions about the creative process of writing poetry. They asked lots of interesting questions of the poet, who was also a correctional officer. After the visit, the students commented on how much they enjoyed the exchange.

(continued on page 11)

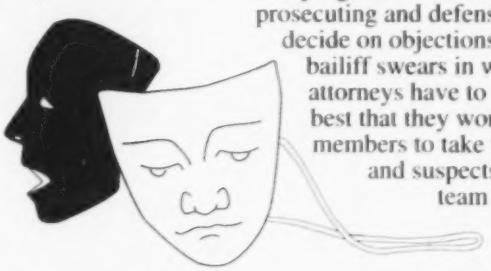
Courtroom Drama and the Literacy Classroom

by Joanne Dowdy

(Dr. Joanne Dowdy is Assistant Director of the Center for the Study of Adult Literacy at Georgia State University. She can be reached at 404.651.0403 or via e-mail at <ALCJDD@langate.gsu.edu>.)

The use of play-acting in the classroom allows students to move from learning language by rote, to a higher level of interpretation (Lederer,1981). Students can enhance their oral skills and learn to make sense of themselves and others from participating in drama. Acting "as if" allows people the opportunity to engage their feelings and to work cooperatively to create understanding of a situation from an insider's perspective (King, 1981). Performing roles allows students to overcome their original perspectives on a given situation and to achieve new insights through the eyes of the characters that they create or analyze. The practical experience of speaking as if you are another person forces you to engage in different ways of solving problems or recognizing that problems exist at all.

In 1996 the Durham Literacy Council in Durham, North Carolina and I developed a literacy workshop built around this principle for adult basic education students. Faced with the task of also providing substantive information about family law, we invited two second year law students to research components of family law that would be used as the basis for the mock trial. The law student volunteers chose to act as judge and defense lawyer in the trial so that we could keep the trial within the boundaries of a legal hearing. All other parts were played by students and their instructors. We felt that the life experiences of all would encourage lively discussion around the scene we chose to enact.



The opportunity to brainstorm ideas about each character's history, the meaning of the actions that took place in the scene, or the possible means of bringing a successful indictment, engaged the students in a series of reflections. They had to stick to the facts in the script when they talked about their ideas. Sometimes interjecting their personal experience as a reference point to explain a character's actions, the students had to use the rule of the law to make a decision for or against the character in question.

We saw the literacy students who performed become more committed to an individual character's perspective as they rehearsed. Their identification with the characters could be characterized as going to some "fuller feeling" for the person (Cazden and Lobdell, 1993). They overcame their inhibitions about reading from the script as they engaged with the logic of the text and communicated their intentions through the speeches (Funk, 1988). Each speaker was able to credibly represent the character in a specific set of circumstances. This imaginative dimension acted to "enhance the resources," to quote Cazden and Lobdell, that the literacy student brought to the task of writing on the Courtroom Drama.

Creating a trial out of literature allows you to "challenge your students' understanding"(Funk,1988). The basis of this approach involves the perspective that every story has a conflict and therefore it is easy to question the characters in the story on the rationale behind their actions. A person can prove a case for or against a character once they have made a decision about the crime that the character allegedly committed. Proof of guilt or innocence can be supported by the analysis of evidence or the characters' explanation of their actions. Characters can also infer facts from the evidence provided from the sequence of events.

Besides setting up a credible circle of relationships among the characters in the story who will be presented at the trial, it is also necessary to inform the class of some of the legal terms that are used in the courtroom i.e. judge, bailiff, defense and prosecuting attorney, jury, motive, testimony, defendant, alibi, witness, objection sustained, objection overruled, contempt of court, oath, perjury, and evidence.

The roles of judge, attorneys, and bailiff are the most time consuming as far as preparing for the trial situation. The judge has to state the purpose of the trial, call the prosecuting and defense attorneys at the right time, decide on objections, and keep order in the court. The bailiff swears in witnesses and tags evidence. The attorneys have to prepare lists of questions so it is best that they work in teams, and allow each of the members to take turns questioning the witnesses and suspects. The attorneys also advise their team members on the choices available to them if and when surprising pieces of evidence turn up.

The conclusion of this workshop included a group discussion of the various characters in the trial i.e. the family, the judge, the lawyer and the jury. There was a great deal of concern around the issue of choosing scenes that could be depicted in an adult basic literacy classroom. People expressed concern about the fact that many students were either involved in law cases or had intimate knowledge of the process of dealing with legal authorities, and this fact would need to be respected from the onset.

It was difficult for the literacy students to deal with writing their thoughts about the law, the experience of the characters in the mock trial, and their emotions concerning their personal experiences with the law. But the success of the workshop was evidenced in the fact that all the participants had traveled from an outside status,

(continued on page 11)

In Defense of a Practical Education

continued from page 1

To train the poor, without a practical education to support them, would have been like constructing a house of cards. Viniece Walker, in her eighth year in a maximum security prison, knew the danger of impractical education. She called for rescuing the long-term poor from their situation by exposing them to what she called "the moral life of downtown," a life of concerts, lectures, museums, libraries -- the humanities. It was the life Socrates had suggested in the Apology, the one he asked his friends to provide for his sons, who would survive his execution. And who was more practical than Socrates, the man who had brought philosophy from the heavens down to earth?

The practicality of an education in the humanities for the poor -- or for anyone -- begins to become clear when we think of the purpose of education, which as Socrates suggested, is to make people dangerous. Not to make criminals of them, of course, but to make them dangerous in the way that he was a danger to the state when it was controlled by a tyrannical oligarchy. We want our fellow citizens to have legitimate power, and that is not an entirely unselfish desire, since we can have no power without them. Alone, in a private world, we are powerless, vulnerable, not dangerous, but in danger. Only in the public life, in our role as political animals, exactly as Aristotle described us, are we able to have power, to begin to govern ourselves rather than being governed. Only in the public life are we free.

What the woman in the prison had realized was that freedom and power, which she understood through their negation, originated in the humanities. It had happened in ancient Athens, a society every bit as flawed as ours, where women were not citizens and many people were held in slavery, but where something began twenty-five hundred years ago. The humanities, works by Homer, Sappho, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and the sculptors, painters, architects, and musicians, exposed to the great majority of the citizenry, led to reflective thinking. When the Athenians reflected on the polar opposites of social organization, order and liberty, all that was known to the world at the time, they sought some middle ground, and they invented the idea of self-government, which they called democracy. A practical education had changed the future of humanity, as it would again and again throughout history.

Galen, who revolutionized medicine, wrote a philosophical treatise entitled, "The Best Physician Is a Philosopher." Copernicus, educated in the humanities at the end of the 15th century in Kracow, would literally turn the universe inside out. Einstein, who probably loved Mozart more than mathematics, would change the world again. A practical education not only changed nations, it enabled astronomers, physicians, mathematicians to think beyond the limits of the routine of learning by doing, training. The question was, Could such an education make a difference for the long-term poor?

Years in the field, working on the book that became "New American Blues," had shown that the multi-generational poor, because of their circumstances, were not able to participate in the political life at any level, from the family to the neighborhood to the polis. Life for them was exactly the opposite of the political life Pericles had described for the Athenians. In fact, the poor lived in "a surround of force" that did not permit them the time to think reflectively. Could the humanities help them to break out of the surround of force, enabling them to enjoy the lives of citizens? Was a practical education an antidote to the harsh circumstances that caused people to be poor?

We began with thirty students, recruited from settlement houses, drug rehabilitation programs, and neighborhood centers. Of those who entered the course, five had been in prison, three were homeless, and one, who was to die before the end of the year, suffered from AIDS. They were exactly the kind of people Allan Bloom had said were not fit for the humanities. The only requirements for coming to the course were a history of poverty and the ability to read a tabloid newspaper. At the end of the orientation session, I passed out the first reading. It had been suggested by Viniece Walker: Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*. Her reason for the choice was to become the essence of the course and the proof of the practicality of the humanities: Poverty was like life inside the cave, where everything was mere illusion, there was no truth. Education, not training, was coming out into the light, where the truth could be seen.

It was to prepare people for what must come later, the mastery of technique, which we call training. Education was to teach the students in the Clemente Course to use their rational powers to think, to enjoy beauty. The purpose of the humanities for them, as for anyone else, was to bring out their innate humanity. About three months into the course, the first anecdotal evidence of the practical application of the humanities was delivered by David Howell, who telephoned me on a Saturday, to talk about a problem. Mr. Howell (The course was very formal, as well as rigorous; we addressed each other always as Mister and Ms.) said that a fellow worker, a woman, had lied about him to his boss, and that it had caused him some trouble. Mr. Howell was a big man, twenty-six years old, and his mother had told me he had a bad temper. With some trepidation, I asked, "And then what happened, Mr. Howell?""Mr. Shores," he said, anglicizing my name, "I got so mad I wanted to throw her up against a wall." It was a terrible moment. I feared he was making his one telephone call from a jail somewhere. "And what did you do?" "Mr. Shores, I asked myself, 'What would Socrates do?'"

There were to be many more examples as the year went on. Psychological pre- and post-testing showed statisti-

(continued on page 9)

In Defense of a Practical Education

continued from page 8

cally significant changes in the ability to think reflectively, to use negotiation in times of conflict, and to participate in community activities. A practical education in the humanities had begun to change the isolated, excluded poor into political people. When training for careers came later on, they would be prepared. The most astonishing aspect of the course, which Socrates might have called an education for "wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul" rather than for "heaping up the greatest amount of money", is that the students came away understanding riches as wisdom and beauty.

Seventeen of the students completed the course. Fourteen earned credit from Bard College, a fine liberal arts college in upstate New York that has become the administrative home of the course. Of those who completed the Clemente Course, nine are now attending four year colleges, one is in nursing school, and all the rest are working, except for one who was fired from her job in a fast food restaurant for attempting to start a union.

Although none of the students had money, everyone who attended the course is richer now, which is what I promised them in the beginning. They read poetry, visit museums, and try to think rationally about the world. For the most part, they have left the unexamined life behind. Poverty and the memory of what poverty had briefly made of them has been put away; they have shed that skin and emerged as citizens. They are the products of an experiment in practical education.

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From *New American Blues*, by Earl Shorris. Published by W.W. Norton & Company in the fall of 1997.

"Wildflower"

The woman sat hunched over a metal and wood veneer table in the intake section of the clinic. It was the beginning of winter in New York, the season of darkening days and influenza. She wore two knit caps, one atop the other, both of them pulled down over her temples. Her body was thin, curled like a bent wire inside her pale, almost white raincoat. She wore the coat buttoned to her chin and belted tightly at the waist, even though she was indoors in a heated room. Her name was Silveria, which means "of the woods," like the wildflower. In profile, she appeared to be drawn down, curled over her woes. All the forms of her were curled in the same way, as if she had been painted by an artist overly concerned with repetitions. Even her hands were curled, half-closed, resting tensely upon the table. The girls, her daughters, were also bent over the table. They had not curled up like their mother, but their eyes were downcast, and their elegant, equine faces were impassive. The mother and the girls sat alone, shut off from the rest of the room. The psychologist in charge of the session whispered that they lived in a shelter for battered women and they were very depressed. During the intake session the woman and her daughters said little. They filled out the forms provided to them by the psychologist. The mother did not remove her coat or her caps. The faces of the girls remained stony, a practiced gray.

When some workmen came to repair a wall in the intake room, the session was moved into another, smaller room. The mother, who had curled up in the new place to fill out the intake forms, wanted to know the meaning of a word as it was used in one of the questions and how it could apply to a person's mental state. I responded as best I could. She accepted the answer and went on filling out the form. The girls finished their forms first, and sat still and silent in their chairs, gray stone horses. I asked one of the girls if she went to school. She said she was a high school student, but that she was not happy in her school.

"Are you a good student?"

"Yes, I get only A's."

"And what is your favorite subject?"

"I like to read books."

"Do you have a favorite author?" I asked

"Yes, Gabriel Garcia Marquez."

We began to talk about Garcia Marquez, about this story and that. About *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which we spoke of as *Cien Azos de Soledad*. In a matter of moments, the two girls and I were in deep discussion about our favorite Latin American writers. Then the mother joined in. "Neruda," the girls said. The mother reminded us of the value of the Cuban, Carpentier. Did I know that it was Carpentier who had first written of a rain of butterflies? I asked if they knew the Dominican poet, Chiqui Vicioso. We talked about the Mexicans: Carlos Fuentes and Sor Juana. Octavio Paz was still too difficult for the girls. They were interested in Elena Poniatowska, but they had not read her. They did not like Isabel Allende very much. The mother uncurled, opening like a fern. The equine girls laughed. They told their favorite stories from literature, they talked about the Cuban movies made from the Garcia Marquez stories: *The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World, Innocent Erendira, A Very Old Gentleman with Some Enormous Wings*.

Soon, the young psychologist joined in. One of the girls recited a poem she had written. Everyone in the room listened. The mother told a joke, pausing twice in the middle to cough. A Puerto Rican woman on the other side of the small room told the names of her favorite stories. Before long, the curled-up woman and her equine daughters and all the other people in the room, including the psychologist and the writer, had created a public world. The room of depression became a community of equals. The battered woman, who had no work, no place to call home but a secret shelter far from any place she had ever known, shared in the power of the public place. She removed her caps and let her hair fall loose, and when she smiled everyone could see that she was the source of the elegance of her daughters.

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Vermont Council on the Humanities - Book Discussion Groups for Adult Basic Education Students

continued from page 3

the programs, Julie Landry is ardent in her assertion that "I can't now imagine teaching adult basic education without Connections books and programs."

Joan Collins, a tutor and manager of an adult learning center in Vermont's most rural area, the Northeast Kingdom, notes the importance of the Council's careful selection of the books used for Connections and for the annual literacy student conference. "They may be written for a twelve-year-old, but you'd never know it," Joan says. She excitedly reported that the book discussion groups are "like when I was in college! Even though it's a low reading level, it's a high thinking level."

Karen Song, a new instructor at The Tutorial Center in Bennington, confesses that she learned a great deal about her students when she neglected to tell her first Connections scholar that the group would be primarily students of English as a second language, along with a smaller number of native English speakers with only the most basic reading skills. Overcoming these obstacles, Karen said, the scholar brought the students to a much higher level of discussion of ideas than Karen herself would have attempted. From this experience, Karen realized that her "students' conceptual levels are much more advanced than their reading and writing." She gained a new respect for her students' intellects and has changed the way she works with them accordingly.

For the Vermont Council on the Humanities, Connections book discussions and the annual literacy student conference have become an integral part of the range of programs we offer to fulfill our mission of "creating a state in which every individual reads, participates in public affairs, and continues to learn throughout life." We believe that in a vibrant democracy, all must have the opportunity to participate in the discussion and resolution of important issues. For that reason, we have taken up the cause of literacy — of helping create communities of readers. It was epiphany that got us started. It is results that keep us going. Cornelius Hogan, Vermont's Secretary of Human Services wrote in a personal note to VCH's executive director recently, "Victor, I took your annual report on a long plane ride. . . and concluded that your work is actually changing Vermont." Brenda Brown White, an adult literacy student and participant in VCH programs for over a decade, recently testified with several other students at a public hearing on VCH's behalf. Brenda stated that she "wanted to thank the humanities council for being there for us. I hope you will be there for others into the future." We will.

Learning through the Arts

continued from page 5

abstract symbols and to discover new concepts on their own terms. The key is to encourage the learner's *natural* desire and their willingness to pursue learning for the sheer joy of doing so. Direct experience therefore creates valuable memories to be mined and cultivated as treasured stories later in life. Through the magic of life histories, self-discovery and cognitive imagination, the act of translating the everyday interactions into formal education is made easier. It also keeps alive the immediacy of knowing and fuels thought, reflection, and valuable conversations.

A "Real-Life" Example

I believe the artists in residence model is useful in developing programs involving the arts. In a project launched between a state arts agency and local community college, a playwright was placed in a variety of literacy sites throughout the county to work with adult learners. The artist worked initially with college faculty and administrators to define the project and to determine the appropriate strategies to be used in implementing the plan. He then worked alongside other faculty to engage students in the development of a play written and later performed by all involved. Five benefits emerged that are useful in developing similar programs designed to increase students' academic motivation: (1) participants' understanding of their particular circumstances were heightened; (2) they were empowered to produce more effective ways of responding to their situations; (3) they used their creative intellect in developing viable solutions to everyday problems; (4) their confidence and desire to participate increased, and (5) they were able to successfully communicate their ideas in a public performance. More importantly, students found their experience exciting, fun, and enduring.

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Hooked on Learning: *The Internet Poetry Project*

continued from page 6

The highlight of the project for me was the final assignment. The students and I jotted down the first three things that we noticed each morning for three successive days. Next, we listed everyone's observations. We each took a copy of the list home and used it to help generate an original poem. We then read some of the poems in class. It was a successful exercise in collaboration.

The Results

Every student - and I - wrote a poem. The following is one of my student's writings.

I Got the Blues
by Shirlene Bush

While walking down the sidewalk
Feeling like I got the blues,
A bird flew in front of me
Singing, as if it was saying, "Be happy!"

But my mind was so foggy
That if I was driving a car,
I was sure to run off the road.
The State Trooper would come along
Wanting to give me a ticket for speeding.
"I wasn't speeding," I would say to him.

The fog of my mind was so deep,
If a big yellow bus came by I wouldn't
have seen that.

Then I looked up.
I saw the sun gleaming down
between the fog.
I looked down and what did I see?
A bright red rose being kissed by a dewdrop.

For a moment I smiled; then I
remembered
the deep fog of my mind.

I got the blues all over again.

By the end of the unit on poetry, I had a lot of data to analyze: typed assignment sheets, class questions, e-mailed correspondence, and original poems. In addition, I kept an electronic journal during the class and taped interviews with three of the students. Upon reviewing the data and judging by their comments and enthusiasm, using computers and the Internet did help spark the student's interest in poetry. I believe they were better prepared for the Literacy and Arts section of the GED test after completing the poetry unit.

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Shirlene Bush was a student in Linda Parrish's technology writing class.

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Courtroom Drama and the Literacy Classroom

continued from page 7

viewing the scene, to inside status where they learned about the personal implications of actions taken by the characters.

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Upcoming Events

International Conference on Women & Literacy

January 24 - 26, 1999
Atlanta, GA

The International Conference on Women and Literacy will bring together a diverse constituency of researchers, practioners, learners, and policy makers. This constituency is being brought together to pose problems and develop an understanding of the linkages between women's lives and their literacies. Issues for discussion will include welfare reform, domestic violence, health, and ethnicity as they relate to women and literacy.

For more information contact Sandy Vaughn at the Center for the Study of Adult Literacy at Georgia State University at (404)651-1400 or email <alcsvv@langate.gsu.edu>.

Technology and Adult Basic Education: The Changing Role of Teachers --1999 Winter Institute--

January 27 - 29, 1999
Atlanta, GA

As the use of technology proliferates in the adult basic education classroom, the role of the teacher may be expected to change. Some suggest that employing technology may require a shift from more traditional didactic teaching to a more facilitative approach. The 1999 Winter Institute will provide a forum where the ramifications of technology and adult basic education will be explored.

For more information contact Barbara Christopher or Mark Johnson at Georgia Tech's Lifelong Learning Network at (800)428-7323 or via email at <barbara.christopher@arch.gatech.edu> or <mark.johnson@arch.gatech.edu>.

Lifelong Learning Network
Center for Rehabilitation Technology
Georgia Institute of Technology
Atlanta, Georgia 30332-0156

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